

# TALKING BY SIGNS.

UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE IS ONE OF MOTIONS.

Confucius, Ramezes and Sitting Bull Might Carry on a Conversation—Though Not Speaking Same Tongue, Indians Can Understand Each Other.

There is an old story of the man who was too bashful to talk in company and who received from a friend the rude advice, "If you can't talk, make signs." There was more to this remark than might at first appear. It points back to the infancy of human intelligence. The language of signs is as old as the hills, or at least as old as humanity; it is old as any form of animal life wherein thought or emotion has required expression.

The American Indians are the greatest sign talkers now left in the world; or, perhaps more properly, it might be said that they were such until the advance of white civilization changed many of the requirements of their lives and thus altered many of their customs, this among them. The average white man never learned the sign language of the Indians, perhaps having contempt for it, perhaps ignorant that such a thing existed. It was only the half savage trapper or hunter, the voyageur or plainsman whose life was spent among the tribes and who thus performed must learn some manner of speech, who came to understand fully and practice habitually the sign language. Not all white men can learn

along with it in toward the legs—a sign as obvious as the beckoning hand, and visible at a greater distance. A blanket fastened to a long pole and thrust up into the air meant to a moving and scattered party: "Go into camp here." Yet other signals, as for "Attention," or "Be careful," were made by the rolled or folded blanket.

### Smoke Signals.

The traveler upon the plains in the early days soon learned the significance of the spires of smoke which he sometimes saw rising from a distant ridge or hill, and which in turn he might see answered from a different direction. It was the signal talk of the Indians, across miles of intervening ground, a signal used in rallying the warriors for an attack or warning them for a retreat when that seemed advisable. The Indian had a way of sending up the smoke in rings or puffs, knowing that such a smoke column would at once be noticed and understood as a signal and not taken for the smoke of some campfire. He made the rings by covering his little fire with his blanket for a moment, then suddenly removing the blanket and allowing the smoke to ascend, when he instantly covered up the fire again. The columns of ascending smoke rings said to every Indian within a circle of perhaps twenty or thirty miles, "Look out. There is an enemy near." Three smokes built close together meant "Danger." One smoke merely said "Attention." Two smokes meant "Camp at this place." Travel the plains and the usefulness of this long distance telephone will quickly become apparent.

Sometimes at night the settler or traveler saw fiery lines crossing the

understood by all. This is something interesting to study, but it has properly no connection with the sign language used as a common vehicle of communication in conversation. The sign language proper was executed by the movements, gestures and positions of the hands and arms, sometimes of other members of the body. To learn the simple signals of the plains was easy to any one who cared to do so, but the mastery of the sign talk was a matter far more complex and difficult and for some white men the task was too much. Indeed, it seems that there were degrees of proficiency in the sign talk even among the Indians themselves.

Some of the Indian signs are simple and readily understood. When the sign talker straddled his left hand with the two split fingers of the right you caught the idea of "horse" almost at once. When he held the hands thus and advanced them with a series of short, choppy, forward movements, you saw that the horse was going, that it was galloping. When the talker hooked his two forefingers and held his hands up at the sides of his head you saw the hooked horns of the buffalo, and you knew what he meant. If he thrust both arms above his head, spread out, and with the fingers spread out, you saw the branching antlers of the elk unmistakably. The wolf sign, the first two fingers of each hand held close together and upright at each side of the head, indicated the erect ears of that animal plainly. Not quite so plain, yet plain enough if you are a hunter, was the sign for the mountain bighorn sheep—the two hands, one at each side of the head, describing the outward and forward curve of the horns. The

forefinger down upon the hand as he brings the hand quickly down in front of him. It is hard to explain, but when you see him do it you know he means "I've got you."

### Best Sign Talkers.

Among the various Western Indian tribes the Southern peoples seem to have been the most proficient in the sign language, just as the Southern races of Europe are those who talk best with their hands. The Klowas and Comanches were admittedly the best sign talkers, though this was no doubt merely by reason of the fact that they had, in the days when sign talk ruled upon the plains, more occasion to use the sign language. Maj. J. W. Powell points out, in his interesting compilations from the records of the government ethnological office, the fact the Klowas were supposed to get some of their sign talk from early Spaniards, or, at least, after the advent of the Spaniard they appear to have obtained great proficiency. It may be possible that these Southern tribes, meeting white men often in the earlier days, came to perfect themselves in the most feasible form of communication which then seemed possible.

One will not see so much of the old sign talk among the tribes to-day if he travels among the reservations of the West. For the Indian is nothing if not practical, and he does anything in the easiest possible way. The changes in his life have rendered it unnecessary for him to rely much upon the sign language. There are halfbreeds and Carlisle graduates to interpret for him, and he likes to stand up before the Great Father and make a speech in that way, being always an orator, an actor, and an individual well aware of the full value of stage effect and dramatic action. He does not use the sign language because he does not have to use it. Hence it is now passing away. Scientists are beginning to study it, and are making minute records regarding the old speech of the plains. The United States government and the Smithsonian Institution are doing all they can to learn the old forms. The few trappers and hunters of the past who were once familiar with the sign talk, and who still live to tell us about it are sought out and interviewed carefully. Once a common fact, because it arose from a common necessity, it is now disappearing to join the ancient and soon to be forgotten story of one of the most interesting and most dramatic regions ever known in all the history of the world.

### Highland Venison.

Most of the red deer venison which finds its way to London is Scotch-wild venison, shot in the forests. There is great difference in quality in this highland venison. To be good, venison needs to be fat, and unlike most game the "artificially fed" deer, or, rather, the deer that enjoys the feed of a good English park, is better for the table than when picking up a hard living on a Scotch mountain, but there are varieties of Scotch deer. Those in forests with plenty of low ground attached grow fat and heavy, and the meat is as good as that of an English park-fed stag. At the end of October and beginning of November the flesh deteriorates rapidly and is rank and poor, evidence, if any were needed, that the shooting ought to have closed earlier, but a good deal of Russian venison, shipped ready and cut up into joints, is very poor stuff. The same rules as to season govern the supply of red deer venison from English parks, but the weight and quality of the latter are superior to the Scotch. Most large proprietors find a sale for their spare venison near home, and consequently it is less common in the market. Red deer hinds are again in season in winter, but the fallow venison is in every way better. Some is even stall fed, and the carcasses show almost as much fat as does small mutton.

### When Eugenie Led the Fashion.

In her day Empress Eugenie was the leader of fashion and her pin money for dress was fabulous. Her feet and hands were so small that her maids who had her shoes and gloves as perquisites could find no market for them, so they were presented by the empress every year to the orphans of the Eugenie Napoleon asylum, where fifty fatherless and motherless girls were educated at her cost. All the white shoes and white gloves which those girls wore at their first communion were those which had been worn by the empress.

### Population of the British Isles.

The census will be taken on the last day of March, 1901. Ten years ago, when the last census took place, the population of the United Kingdom was 37,740,283. The registrar general estimates the present population at 40,931,471.

### All in the Interest of Science.

Prof. Emil Yung of Geneva, Switzerland, has counted the ants in five nests. Their numbers were 53,018, 67,470, 12,933, 93,694 and 47,828.

When a minister fails to stick to his text it may be because he believes scattered shot hits the most birds.

As the salt savors the broth, so does labor give relish to pleasure.

### MRS. BRYAN.

Her Husband's Partner in Law and Politics, as Well as at Home.

No one who has watched the career of William Jennings Bryan since his first nomination for the Presidency can have failed to observe the devotion of this remarkable man to his clever little wife, nor her enthusiastic co-operation in his political work. She has been an inspiration and aid to him ever since his entrance into public life and has been his constant companion on many of his severest campaigning tours. She was with him at Chicago in 1896, when his meteoric eloquence flashed across that chaotic assemblage of Democrats and so thrilled them that his nomination was the only possible result. Following that event she rode with him over thousands of miles of railroad lines and sat on hundreds of platforms with him, her heart swelling with pride as she saw him stand before millions of his fellow-countrymen and receive their applause. She was disappointed by his defeat, but with an abiding faith in his future, was not disheartened. During the campaign just closed she remained at home until about two weeks before election, when, fearing that the terrible strain was breaking



MRS. W. J. BRYAN.

her husband's health, she joined him at New York, believing that her presence would impel him to be more cautious as to his physical condition, and remained with him until the end. Election day she went with him to inspect their farm and in the evening she entertained his friends while receiving election returns. If his second defeat discouraged her, she gave no manifestation of it.

Mrs. Bryan's maiden name was Mary Elizabeth Baird. She attended a seminary adjacent to Illinois College, at Jacksonville, when Bryan was a student there. Their marriage took place a year after he was admitted to the bar. Without neglecting the duties of her home, she fitted herself to follow her husband into the broader fields of human activity. In 1887 she took a course in law at Illinois College and when they moved to Nebraska she was admitted to the bar. She kept always in touch with him. While his chief interest lay in the practice of the law she studied law and aided him in his office. When he turned to politics and statecraft, she, too, took up the questions of the day and investigated them intelligently and exhaustively. Mr. Bryan frankly confesses the aid she has given him in preparing his addresses. During his term in the House of Representatives she never failed to be in the gallery when he was to speak, and her presence stimulated as her aid before had prepared him.

The most pleasing phase of the Bryans' life is their domestic circle. While participating in her husband's public life, Mrs. Bryan has not neglected the home. She keeps one servant, but does much of her own work and her three children—one boy and two girls—show the results of her careful training. At home Mr. and Mrs. Bryan are like unmarried lovers.

### Lids of Fruit Jars.

The lids of fruit jars taken from the top shelf of the kitchen closet, where they may have lain long in retirement, should be sterilized before using. Put them into cold water and bring the water to the boiling point; take them out one by one with a clean skimmer and slip each upon its jar. They should not be handled with the fingers except to screw quickly into place, nor should they be left on the table nor wiped with towels that have been hanging in the kitchen. Any of these acts make the sterilizing process useless, as germs may be picked up in this way after has been accomplished.

### Cause for Alarm.

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed the girl in the menagerie tent, "Is this horse business going to strike us next?" "What's the matter?" inquired the mate.

"That matinee girl took the arm of a bum."

"I heard her say death if he'd."

—Philadelphia.

Did you hear the hunter?

## ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE SIGNS OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN



the sign language, though some pick it up readily, just as certain persons learn foreign languages more readily than others. The sign talk was in all cases best used by whites who had been among the tribes from early youth. In some cases it was so habitual that it was employed, as it often is by the Indians, as a regular means of daily conversation instead of spoken speech.

To the "tenderfoot" who first went upon the plains in the old days there were some signs or marks which were early accepted as obvious or generally understood. Thus, he saw a slim pile of rocks upon the edge of some coulee or ravine. He did not know what that meant at first, and the older plainsmen told him it was for "water." Not even then could he tell who first was the first to use the sign.

The plains learned the fact that the sign was capable of vast distances and could be traversed better by the horse or by the foot. A mile away he saw a horseman riding in a circle—a circle which would appear the same when seen from any direction. He did not know what this meant, but when he was told it said "Come ahead," he did not bother about riding over to the man he wanted to have come ahead. He simply rode his circle, just as had the Indians from whom the white men got this plains sign. If the man were on foot and wanted his friends to come ahead he signified it by squatting down and rising up a number of times in succession—a sign which looks pretty much the same from any direction. You can see such a sign a mile or more, and it is easier to talk that way than to try to shout over vacant miles of prairie.

The Indians used yet another sign to say "come ahead" when secrecy was necessary. This was made by taking hold of the lower part of the blanket or robe which one was wearing and pulling it up over the head, then moving the hands in a circle, as if to show a horseman riding in a circle—a circle which would appear the same when seen from any direction. He did not know what this meant, but when he was told it said "Come ahead," he did not bother about riding over to the man he wanted to have come ahead. He simply rode his circle, just as had the Indians from whom the white men got this plains sign. If the man were on foot and wanted his friends to come ahead he signified it by squatting down and rising up a number of times in succession—a sign which looks pretty much the same from any direction. You can see such a sign a mile or more, and it is easier to talk that way than to try to shout over vacant miles of prairie.

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sky, shooting up and falling, perhaps taking a direction diagonal to the line of vision. He might guess that these were the signals of the Indians, but unless he were an old-timer he might not be able to interpret the signals. The old-timer and the squaw man knew that one fire arrow (an arrow prepared by treating the head of the shaft with gunpowder and fine bark) meant the same as one column of smoke puffs—viz.: "An enemy is near." Two fire arrows meant "Danger." Three arrows said imperatively, "This danger is great." Several arrows said, "The enemy are too many for us." Two arrows shot up into the air at once meant, "We shall attack." Three at once said, "We attack soon." Four arrows at once said "We attack now." An arrow shot off in a diagonal direction said as plainly as a pointing finger, "That way." Thus it seems that the untutored savage could telephone fairly well at night as well as in the daytime.

In the forests as well as upon the plains it was sometimes necessary for one man to communicate with another while the two were separated by days of time or miles of distance. What boy has not left a slanting stick to tell his companion which path he has taken in the woods? The boy does without instruction precisely what the savage does. When one party of Indians wishes to tell another party where it has gone the leader places a stick, stuck slantwise in the ground, pointing in the direction taken by the departing party. This is an index finger, saying plainly, "That way." But if the newly arriving party saw a cross stick stuck into the earth at right angles to the index it was known, in the language of the signs, that the first party intended to travel one day. Two cross sticks meant two days, and so on. These people could not write a letter to pin upon the stick, but their message was done the less plain to those who read it.

### Sign Talk Proper.

Such were some of the long distance signals of the tribes, simple and easily

finger and thumb slightly approached and held at the side of the head indicated less obviously the pronghorn of the antelope. The sign for snake was simple, and any one would understand it—the extended forefinger thrust out before the body in a waving line, like the course of the snake in traveling. Not quite so obvious is the sign for "lie, liar, he lies." Here we get back to the ancient symbol of the serpent, which seems to be the synonym for duplicity among all peoples and for all times. The liar sign is made everywhere by the forked fingers thrust out in front of the mouth, or across the body—"He speaks with a forked tongue." This is ancient Indian rhetoric for you, but it is correct. The sign for "truth, it is true," would obviously be the single finger used in a similar manner—"He speaks with a single tongue."

Yet others of the simpler signs are easy of comprehension by the man who is capable of casting off his customary habits of thought and trying to be a child again. Thus, we say a man is in doubt, he wavers mentally, he is shaken in his mind, he hesitates. When the Indian sees something strange to him, whose name he does not know, about which he is in doubt, he points to it, then shakes his loosely extended fingers in front of him. "What is that?" "I don't know what that is," he says, plainly, when you come to think of it.

Now, stop to think what you do with your hand when you say "No!" and say it emphatically. What does the heroine do on the stage when she spurns the villain's suit? Hand palm out, swept sharply down and to the right. It is "No" as plain as can be. Upon the other hand, we all know the implication of the extended hand when it is held in front of the body, as when one shakes hands or is pleased, or says it is all right—the gesture of assent or of concurrence. When the Indian would say "Good! It is all right," he throws out his right hand in front of him, palm down, the edge of the hand away from him. When he says "Yes" he snaps his